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1961/05/02

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2 May 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, WH/4/PM

SUBJECT: 1. Straightening Out Dates of Strike Force Concept
for the Taylor Committee

1. [REDACTED] has in his notes instructions to write a paper straightening out in the Taylor Committee's mind when we actually became involved in strike operations. The need for this paper apparently arises from Lt. Col. Egan's statement to the effect that we always had a strike force concept. During his testimony he apparently made reference to a trip he took in June to one of the training camps, indicating at the time of trip the strike operation had already been decided upon. My recollection is that Lt. Col. Egan came to us about June 1960 and that he arrived with certain ideas which he carried from the Pentagon on how best to tackle the Cuban problem. This, however, did not constitute [REDACTED] policy. I am sure you--or more particularly, members of your staff--will find that we had no approved philosophy of the operation within the Project until well in September. The training program [REDACTED] was directed solely toward training an instructor cadre in small unit or "guerrilla-type" operations. This cadre when it arrived in Guatemala, in addition to working on building the camp [REDACTED], continued to train the first recruits in the same kind of training they had received.

2. Another example of my positiveness that we were not, at Project level, thinking of a strike operation is the first conversation that we held in my office in Barton Hall wherein I referred to the fact that the PM staff had been talking about the development of a strike operation, but that I, myself, was not convinced of it at the time and that I preferred to put small teams into existing units at the appropriate time. As I recall, you had an open mind at that point although without positive study of Cuba you leaned toward the concept I outlined. It was at a somewhat later date, therefore (probably before the first of October), that we talked again and you stated your conviction that CASTRO could not be overthrown without a major or catalytic effort being made against him. After deliberation I came to the same conclusion and we then began to think in terms of expanding the force to the strength of a reinforced battalion more-or-less.

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3. The foregoing is important only because General Taylor is going into very fine points in his analysis of government policy. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to get the record straight in this manner, and, although Lt. Col. Egan may have had in his own mind the idea of a strike operation-- and I believe he came to us with some ideas on hitting the Isle of Pines-- this nevertheless was not approved Project or Agency policy until quite a few months later. In point of fact, as I look back over that period I'm sure during that period I found myself drifting along devoting myself merely to creating basic capabilities in a variety of fields without any clear-cut idea of what national policy would permit us to do.

4. I hope the foregoing will be of some use to the PM staff in putting together the paper required by General Taylor. I will be available all day today; however, if further clarification is needed over and above that readily available within the PM staff, I suppose [redacted] or [redacted] would be in the best position to comment on this as they were, in fact, the only instructors on the scene at the time.

Jacob D. Esterline
C/WH/4

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